

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00366 030013Z

61

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TAGS: PINT, ECON, CA

SUBJECT: LEVESQUE TO AVOID CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES IN OTTAWA

MEETING, QUEBEC CABINET TACKLES ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

REF: QUEBEC 360

1. IN BOTH A TELEVISION INTERVIEW AND A TELEGRAM SENT TO TRUDEAU, PREMIER LEVESQUE INDICATED HIS WILLINGNESS TO ATTEND PREMIERS CONFERENCE DECEMBER 13-14 BUT SUGGESTED IT WOULD BE PREMATURE TO ADDRESS CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES. NOTING THAT BUDGETARY PROBLEMS, THE LANGUAGE QUESTION, AND ELECTORAL REFORMS WERE AMONG MOST IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES OF HIS GOVERNMENT, LEVESQUE STATED OTTAWA MEETING WILL CENTER ON FINANCIAL AND FISCAL QUESTIONS. IN PARTICULAR, PREMIERS WILL DISCUSS THE STATE OF THE CANADIAN ECONOMY, UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLATION. DURING THE INTERVIEW, LEVESQUE REPEATED HIS OFTEN-VOICED DESIRE FOR QUEBEC TO FORM WITH REST OF CANADA A NEW ASSOCIATION BETWEEN EQUALS.

2. FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS TOOK 4 HOURS OF 8 1/2 HOUR FULL CABINET MEETING HELD DECEMBER 1. LEAVING THE MEETING, LEVESQUE TOLD REPORTERS THAT THE GOVERNMENT STILL HAS NOT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00366 030013Z

DECIDED ITS STRATEGY FOR UPCOMING FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL DISCUSSIONS.

GOQ, LEVESQUE STATED, IS IN AN AMBIGUOUS SITUATION BECAUSE IT IS TRYING TO BE A PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT WITHIN THE PRESENT CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AT THE SAME TIME THAT IT PROMOTES INDEPENDENCE AS AN EVENTUAL GOAL.

3. FUNCTIONING OF CABINET SYSTEM, ECONOMIC PRIORITIES, AND MINI-SESSION OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WHICH BEGINS DECEMBER 14 WERE ALSO DISCUSSED. ONLY MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT FOLLOWING MEETING WAS THAT PQ GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO DOUBLE \$225 MILLION SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET FIGURE PROPOSED BY FORMER FINANCE

MINISTER RAYMOND GARNEAU. THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE DECEMBER 14 ASSEMBLY SESSION IS TO PASS SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET LEFT OVER FROM LAST GOVERNMENT AS SEVERAL MINISTRIES ARE SERIOUSLY SHORT OF FUNDS. LEVESQUE SAID GARNEAU'S ESTIMATE "HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH REALITY." LEVESQUE ALSO ANNOUNCED HIS GOVERNMENT WAS REEXAMINING WHOLE ANTI-INFLATION PROGRAM AS IT IS NOT SATISFIED THAT FEDERALLY-INSPIRED CONTROLS ARE WORKING.

4. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, CABINET ALSO MADE STILL SECRET DECISION ON WHETHER TO ACCORD UNION NATIONALE OPPOSITION STATUS. IT WILL ANNOUNCE ITS DECISION AT DECEMBER 14 SESSION. ASSEMBLY RULES STATE THAT PARTY MUST WIN 20 PERCENT OF VOTE OR ELECT 12 DEPUTIES TO RECEIVE SUCH A STATUS. UN RPT UN WON 19.4 PERCENT OF POPULAR VOTE AND ELECTED 11 DEPUTIES. RULES HAVE OFTEN BEEN WAIVED AND RODRIGUE BIRON IS CAMPAIGNING HARD FOR A SIMILAR FAVOR THIS YEAR.

5. COMMENT: PQ GOVERNMENT IS OBVIOUSLY STILL IN INITIAL STAGES OF SETTLING-IN PROCESS. TASK IS PERHAPS MADE MORE DIFFICULT BY FACT THAT THEIR VICTORY WAS NOT EXPECTED. PARTI QUEBECOIS PRIORITIES ARE CURRENTLY FOCUSED ON PROBLEM AREAS INHERITED FROM LAST GOVERNMENT. RENE LEVESQUE HAS NO INTEREST IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL PATRIATION ISSUE WHICH FOR HIM HAS ALWAYS BEEN A NON-ISSUE. IN THE UPCOMING MEETINGS, HE WILL BE TRYING TO OBTAIN ALL POSSIBLE FINANCIAL BENEFITS FOR QUEBEC. MORE DEFINITIVE STATEMENTS ON QUEBEC'S APPROACH TO FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS MAY HAVE TO AWAIT THE FEBRUARY OPENING OF THE FIRST FULL SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. WHILE RENE LEVESQUE APPEARS TO BE FIRMLY IN CONTROL OF HIS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 QUEBEC 00366 030013Z

CABINET, HE IS COMMITTED TO OPEN CABINET DISCUSSION OF IMPORTANT PROBLEMS. IN A GOVERNMENT HEAVY IN HIGHLY VOCAL THEORETICIANS, ONE CAN EXPECT MORE 8-9 HOUR CABINET SESSIONS.

6. STATUS FOR UN RPT UN AS A RECOGNIZED OPPOSITION PARTY WOULD CARRY SOME PREROGATIVES IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE PROCEDURE AND IN EXTRA OFFICE SPACE. IT ALSO GIVES ADDITIONAL PRESTIGE TO A PARTY. AS A RESULT, MANY OBSERVERS HERE BELIEVE

THAT LEVESQUE WILL GRANT UN DESIRED STATUS TO AID IT IN
KEEPING SO-CALLED FEDERALIST VOTE SPLIT BETWEEN LEBERALS
AND UNION NATIONALE, AS OCCURRED ON NOVEMBER 15. ON THE OTHER
HAND, TO DO SO WOULD GIVE THE PQ ANOTHER PARLIAMENTARY ADVERSARY
WITH FULL DEBATING PRIVILEGES AND COULD - INTER ALIA - CONTRIBUTE
TO MORE UN GROWTH THAN THE PQ WOULD LIKE TO SEE. THUS,
THE DECISION WILL NO DOUBT BE BASED ON LEVESQUE'S ESTIMATE
ON THE FUTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR THE UN, I.E. WILL THEY CONTINUE
TO BE MAINLY A THORN IN THE LIBERAL'S SIDE OR COULD THEY GROW
TO POINT OF THREATENING TO TAKE POWER IN A FUTURE ELECTION.
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